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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4790
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 8512
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RIYADH 000581

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LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA
DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI (SHUKAN, JACHIM), INL, DRL
(BARKS-RUGGLES, OZKAN), DRL/IRF (HANFORD, LISTON, LURIE),
G/TIP (LEDERER), DRL/MLGA (NOYES), PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2015
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KWMN](#) [KDEM](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: DRL DAS BARKS-RUGGLES MEETINGS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION AND NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: A. 2006 RIYADH 08841
[B](#). 2006 RIYADH 09031
[C](#). 2006 RIYADH 09217

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) On December 5, 2006, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) Erica J. Barks-Ruggles had separate meetings with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR). These meetings followed up on meetings on September 12 and 13, 2006 (ref A). In both meetings, DAS Barks-Ruggles discussed trafficking in persons, domestic violence, treatment of religious minorities, and the status of women in Saudi Arabia. She also inquired about the status of the HRC and reiterated previous offers of technical assistance to both organizations, which they took under consideration. The HRC board will be named before the end of the year (ref C). In both meetings, Saudis questioned USG treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; the Colorado state court verdict against Homaidan Al-Turki; and discussed women's issues. Barks-Ruggles summarized information regarding Homaidan Al-Turki that she previously provided to the HRC, the NSHR, the SAG, and Al-Turki's family, as well as the points made by the state of Colorado Attorney General Suthers during his recent visit to the KSA (ref B). HRC found the recent visit of the Human Rights Watch (HRW) useful to improving HRW's understanding of the KSA. END SUMMARY.

Human Rights Commission (HRC)

[2](#). (C) On December 5, DAS Barks-Ruggles, IRF Foreign Affairs Officer Kathryn Lurie (representing Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford), and Senior Advisor to the Undersecretary for Global Affairs Laura Lederer (representing G/TIP) met with HRC Chairman Turki Al-Sudairy and Dr. Zaid bin Abdulmohsen Al-Hussein. Al-Sudairy and Al-Hussein explained how the HRC functions. The HRC receives inquiries and complaints from members of the public, companies, police, courts, etc. It then reviews the complaints and forwards them to the relevant SAG ministry. Each ministry is required by royal decree to respond within 30 days to the HRC. The HRC will then follow

up with the ministries on any action taken, including changes to regulations and/or internal procedures. The HRC also liaises with the press, helps improve communication on human rights issues by the SAG, and facilitates and helps educate the public of their rights. The HRC also helps clarify SAG policies and procedures and submits major issues and questions to the King. In response to questions about how the system is working thus far, Al-Sudairy supplied some preliminary statistics on the number of cases -) in the low 100,s)- received thus far. He also noted that some ministries have begun responding to the HRC, but that most responses are non-substantive & we will look into it8 type of responses -- something he hopes to improve over time.

13. (U) Barks-Ruggles asked Al-Sudairy where international experts, NGOs or third country individual citizens could access this process when information comes to light, for example, on a serious human rights issue. He explained that any request for information, complaint or concern should be filed through the MFA with the request that it be passed on to the HRC. He claimed that some cases take a long time to resolve, adding that the SAG was considering forming a grievance board to adjudicate the most serious cases.

14. (SBU) Al-Sudairy claimed that the 24 members of the HRC board would be named before the end of the calendar year. (NOTE: The King announced the formation of the HRC board on December 25, 2006 (ref C). END NOTE) He said the 24 board members are well-known experts and dignitaries. Of the 24, 18 will be full-time and will head departments. Six will be part-time. The board will make decisions by majority vote.

15. (SBU) On women,s issues, Al-Sudairy said that the HRC is establishing a women,s section that will deal with family

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issues. He said that he has already a hired a woman with a doctorate degree. Al-Sudairy also noted that the NSHR is good at dealing with family issues. He said newspapers showed on December 5 photographs of two women sitting next to a Majlis Al-Shura member. He emphasized that a photograph of a woman advising a senior male official represented a major step forward for the KSA though it probably seemed unremarkable to Americans. Barks-Ruggles told Al-Sudairy that dialogue on domestic violence/family protection issues is an important area for bilateral cooperation. Recalling complaints she had received of abuse and insufficient involvement by the Ministries of Health, Social Affairs, and the Interior, she noted that this problem appears to now be more openly in the public. She explained that the issue is multi-faceted and complex, involving police, doctors, lawyers, and government agencies. She said similar problems exist in the U.S. and suggested USG assistance/training opportunities, including interagency cross-training.

16. (SBU) Ms. Lederer outlined the two inter-agency seminars held to date with the Saudi government on trafficking issues and raised concerns about victim protection, liaison with source country governments, and lack of investigation and prosecution of this crime in Saudi Arabia. Al-Sudairy explained that during the Hajj period, over one million foreigners visit the KSA. Some of these visitors overstay their visas, often disappearing throughout the KSA, or children beg in the streets. He said the Interior Ministry can provide further information on overstayers and child beggars, and requested specific ideas and suggestions from the USG regarding overstayers and TIP. Al-Sudairy said that SAG law enforcement does not adequately assist victims and the SAG does not provide adequate government shelters or outreach programs (e.g., hotlines). (COMMENT: Al-Sudairy seemed insufficiently sympathetic toward victims because he believes that many are guilty of overstaying their visas or were willing trafficked into the country by unscrupulous Saudis. END COMMENT).

17. (SBU) Ms. Lurie asked Al-Sudairy about the religious

police. He said that HRC vice chairman Abdulaziz I. Alajlan recently met with the religious police, pointing out that the HRC cannot force itself on the religious police, but can help them do their job more effectively. He said the HRC's focus is on improving the functions of the SAG, including the religious police. Lurie asked about HRC efforts in support of Najrani Ismaili Shi'as who were supposed to be pardoned and released from prison, notably Hadi Al-Mutif. Al-Sudairy thought that Al-Mutif would be released from prison soon, but that the release had been delayed because of problems with the wording of the order.

18. (C) Al-Sudairy raised misunderstandings between Saudis, Americans, and their governments. He said that Saudis do not understand the importance of non-governmental organizations and civil society or how important they are to Americans and the USG. Barks-Ruggles responded by asking Al-Sudairy to help work with us and U.S. NGOs to create bridges and talk about tough issues. Al-Sudairy said that any exchange of information or ideas is helpful, noting it is easier to respond to specific questions or requests for information.

National Society for Human Rights (NSHR)

19. (C) DAS Barks-Ruggles and Lurie also met on December 5 with NSHR members Dr. Mufleh Al-Qahtani, Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Enad, Dr. Abdul Khaleq A. Al-Abdul Hai, Mr. Khalid A. Al-Fakheri, and Ms. Suhaila Zainul Abedin Hammad. Barks-Ruggles repeated her previous request for facts and figures about NSHR's activities. The NSHR representatives claimed that this information will be available in English by the end of the calendar year, though they said some information is on the NSHR website (www.nshrsa.org). NSHR stated that it has received over 6,000 complaints that cover such issues as government activities, prisons, labor, and families. NSHR issues reports every two to four weeks and meeting participants claimed that NSHR has resolved 70 to 75 percent of the complaints it has received.

10. (SBU) To help prevent human rights abuses, including domestic violence, NSHR believes in focusing on education. It seeks to educate Saudis about human rights, including teaching Saudis that the victims are not the wrong-doers. It

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is educating Saudis that the NSHR monitors human rights and will act on complaints. It publishes articles in newspapers to educate Saudis about human rights. Meeting representatives stated that Saudis now know their rights, but there are those who sometimes violate the rights of others. Ms. Hammad told Barks-Ruggles that Saudis do not like outside interference, especially on issues such as women's rights, where Saudi women are pressing their own case based on their own religious and culture traditions. Ms. Hammad outlined her belief that Islam gives women equal rights, but that in the KSA these rights are often not correctly enforced because of tribal traditions. She said that women are viewed as inferiors who need male guardianship and that NSHR hopes to change these views. She said there are problems with Saudi laws and Saudi judges incorrectly applying Islamic laws, noting that the King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue is also debating these issues. One of her male NSHR colleagues contradicted her, claiming that many Saudis believe there is nothing wrong with laws and their implementation reflecting social traditions, but at the same time conceded the prominent role given to women by the Prophet in several areas of public responsibility. Barks-Ruggles responded that the USG wants Saudi citizens to make decisions about the KSA and its government, and was pleased that Saudi women and men were raising difficult issues such as women's role in Saudi society and domestic violence.

¶11. (SBU) As in September, both groups raised issues about Guantanamo and Saudis held in detention there. Barks-Ruggles repeated that the President and Secretary of State have repeatedly stated that they would like to close Guantanamo as soon as possible, but that this will entail willingness of governments to receive detainees who have been determined not to pose a threat, as well as prosecution of those who have committed serious crimes. She said that the International Red Cross has access to the facility at Guantanamo Bay, as well as to the detainees housed there, and emphasized that all detainees have access to appropriate religious materials, diets, and medical care.

¶12. (SBU) Al-Sudairy claimed that the USG should look at the detainees more as victims than criminals. He said that they might not be innocent but they are immature and brainwashed. He said that many of them only have a high school education.

Homaidan Al-Turki

¶13. (SBU) Barks-Ruggles said that following her September meeting with the HRC and the NSHR, she raised their concerns about Homaidan Al-Turki with the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C., and officials of the state of Colorado, including whether he had access to religiously and medically appropriate diet, religious materials, medical care, and was able to pray and fast during Ramadan. She noted that she had sent responses on all these inquiries back through the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh -) something both groups acknowledged and noted their appreciation for. (NOTE: Post provided this information to the MFA, the MoJ, the HRC, the NSHR, and the Majlis al-Shura. END NOTE). She also noted that Colorado Attorney General (AG) Suthers had discussed the case and the process during his visit to the KSA in November (REF B), noting that he had also met with Dr. Al-Hussein of the HRC.

¶14. (SBU) Al-Sudairy, explaining that Saudis do not understand the U.S. legal system, said they do not understand why Homaidan Al-Turki was arrested, convicted, and given such a long prison sentence, adding that the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C., had not provided an explanation. He noted that the AG Suthers had tried to explain this to the Saudi press, including the inability of the USG nor the government of the state of Colorado can overturn the Colorado state court's conviction of Al-Turki.

Reformers

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¶15. (C) Al-Sudairy said that he is in contact with the 13 reformers who were imprisoned in 2003 (Adulrahman Al-Faleh, Mohamad Sayed Tayeeb, Sheikh Sulaiman Ibrahim Al-Rashudi, Najeeb Al-Khunaizi, Dr. Khalik Al-Ajami, Dr. Tawfiq Qasir, Essam Basrawy, Abdulrahman Al-Shumairi, and Mousa Al-Qarni), including the three who were pardoned in 2005 (Abdullah Al-Hamid, Matrouk Al-Faleh, Ali Al-Dimeini, and Abdul-Rahman Al-Lahem). Al-Sudairy also said he had discussed the matter with the Interior Ministry. He asked that the USG forward any questions or information regarding the reformers to both the HRC and the MFA.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

¶16. (SBU) Al-Sudairy claimed that neither the SAG nor the HRC invited the HRW to visit the KSA, but he welcomed the HRW

visit to the KSA. He claimed that the HRC helped with HRW,s visit. He said that it was helpful for the HRW to meet people in order to better understand the KSA and the Saudi people.

COMMENT

¶17. (C) Both the HRC and the NSHR continue to educate the SAG and Saudis about human rights as they respond to complaints from Saudis and seek information from the SAG. Both organizations also seek information from the USG regarding the treatment of Homaidan Al-Turki and detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Neither organization was prepared to fully accept the guilt of Homaidan Al-Turki. Both organizations have only begun to disseminate the information they have gathered, as well as to establish contacts with international human rights organizations such as HRW. The HRC's work has been hampered by the lack of a board of directors, and the NSHR has focused as much on criticism of the USG as it has on human rights concerns in the KSA. As demonstrated during the NSHR meeting, Saudi men and women continue to have different views women's issues.
END COMMENT.
OBERWETTER